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ABSTRACT

The rapid growth of the middle school has necessitated the formation of a new teacher education program. Until the present time, the middle school teacher has received in-service training at the elementary and secondary levels. This method has proved to be inadequate and a preservice education program that is neither elementary nor secondary has been proposed. With the initiation of this program, an investigation was begun of the characteristics of the middle school teacher. This new kind of teacher should not only like working with 10-14-year-olds, but should also be sensitive to their emerging independence, heightened insecurity, and divergent interests. An internship period for the preservice participant would strengthen the student/teacher relationship. The ability of the middle school teacher to cooperate with other teachers was deemed necessary because of the extended use of team teaching. Because problems in reading and communication skills are prevalent in the middle school, the teacher should know how to prescribe for these problems individually. The preservice education program should then include courses and experiences which would aid in dealing with these problems. The program should also include flexible scheduling because of the various courses offered to the middle school student. A list of activities and a model schedule from the Desoto Middle School, Arcadia, Florida were included. (BRB)

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A New Kind of Teacher for the New Middle School

Joseph C. Bondi

The middle school is a new kind of school in American education designed to replace the defunct junior high school. As one actively involved in middle school development, I have had the opportunity to work with many teachers and administrators in helping them make the transition to the middle school. This involvement has made me increasingly aware that the new kind of school called the middle school demands a new kind of teacher to make it successful.

Until recently, most teacher training for the middle school has been in the form of retooling elementary or secondary teachers through inservice training. But the rapid growth of middle schools necessitates a training program at the preservice level. It is clear that present teacher education programs preparing elementary or secondary teachers no longer are adequate for training middle school teachers. The new middle school requires a teacher that is neither elementary nor secondary. What are the characteristics of "the new kind of teacher" we want for the middle school?

1) First and foremost, a middle school teacher must like the age group he is working with--the 10-14-year-olds. Middle school youngsters are the most diverse and exciting age group found at any level of schooling. The teacher choosing to work with the "transescent" found in the middle school--the youngster caught between childhood and adolescence--must be able to cope with:

a) Strong diverse interests

b) Emerging independence

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c) Strong peer influence

d) Sex roles becoming established

e) Turbulent emotions

f) Heightened insecurity

g) Differing levels of achievement in various disciplines

Sensitivity to the needs of middle school youngsters comes through exposure to that age group. Teacher education programs must, early in the preservice teachers training program, get students into middle schools for extended periods of time. The USF program in Tampa calls for a student to spend a whole year or three quarters as an intern in a middle school. Students in those schools work with large groups, small groups, and most important, on a one-to-one basis with middle school youngsters. A thorough study is made of the physical, social, emotional, and intellectual characteristics of the 10-14 age group found in the middle school. The college student in the program has the opportunity during the year to stay in the middle school or move to the elementary or high school if he finds he can't cope with the age group.

2) A second characteristic of the new kind of middle school teacher is his ability to work with other teachers. Almost all middle schools employ some sort of team teaching, either disciplinary or interdisciplinary. Teachers desiring a self-contained or highly departmentalized atmosphere should not choose the middle school. Middle school principals will tell you that, other than a teacher's insensitiveness to the middle school age group, the greatest single problem is the lack of teacher cooperation in planning, teaching, and evaluation.

Another innovative feature of the USF middle school preservice program is to put together an interdisciplinary team of mathematics, science, social studies, and language arts majors who are matched with

an interdisciplinary team in the middle school composed of teachers in the same disciplines. Instead of four teachers representing four areas working with 120 middle school students in an academic block, it becomes eight teachers planning and working together for 120 students. A differentiated staffing pattern emerges and preservice students become integral parts of a teaching team. Again, after a year of team teaching, the preservice teacher in the middle school program can make an intelligent decision about whether he can work with other teachers in a middle school.

Related arts teachers in such fields as art, music, home economics, industrial arts, and physical education also spend considerable time in the middle school working with the related arts team who are providing exploratory experiences for middle school children. They, too, get a chance to see whether they really want to work with the 10-14 age group. They also get a chance to see that their specialty can be related to other fields and that the emphasis in the middle school is not to make musicians or artists of middle school youngsters, but to provide broad exploratory experiences where middle school children can sample many fields through enjoyable activities.

3) A third characteristic of the "new teacher" at the middle school level is his ability to properly diagnose individual needs and make the proper prescriptions. The greatest area of need in middle schools is in the area of reading or communication skills. How can we get every teacher to be a reading teacher, every teacher to work on communication skills? The answer lies in preservice training programs where courses and experiences are provided all teachers--mathematics, science, social studies, etc.--in learning to diagnose and prescribe for reading problems that are so acute in middle schools. The language arts major in a

preservice middle school program must spend more of his time learning how to teach communication skills and less time in literature courses. Students majoring in other areas must obtain the skills of teaching reading and come to realize that reading problems cannot be relegated to the reading teacher or the language arts teacher.

Mathematics teachers have made the most progress in diagnosing and prescribing for individual needs of middle school youngsters. Though most middle schools include grades 6-8 or 5-8, mathematics teachers find the learning continuum of mathematics skills must run from grades K-8 to accommodate the wide ranges of differences found in the middle school. Those children who readily attain the K-8 skills are challenged through independent study and advanced programs to go far beyond what is normally learned in nine years of study.

We must provide teachers who can, through vertical planning, develop a meaningful program for middle school youngsters and teach the skills so necessary for success in later schooling. Social studies teachers, rather than teaching isolated disciplines such as geography one year and American history the next, are breaking down those artificial lines inherited from the high school and offering social studies as a problem-centered study of man's relationships to man. Science also puts man back in the curriculum with a study of man's relationship to his environment. Artificial distinctions of life science, earth science, and physical science disappear in this approach.

The new kind of middle school teacher then becomes more of a generalist in the area of the total needs of the transescent child but still retains a competency in one or more fields.

The early history of the middle school saw a major emphasis on

organizational matters such as team teaching and flexible scheduling with a small increase in exploratory courses taught by specialists. Since 1967-68, schools building on the St. Cloud, Florida model have instituted fifty or sixty interest and exploratory activities taught not only by specialists, but by all teachers and staff in the middle school. A math teacher with an interest in sewing might devote a portion of her day to working with a group of children with the same interest, or a science teacher might work with a small group of youngsters in an anatomy class.

The following list of activities from the outstanding Desoto Middle School in Arcadia, Florida, illustrates the broadened scope of the middle school program:

Agriculture
Advanced Sewing
Beginning Golf
Beginning Guitar
Child Care
Cooking
Creative Expression
Ecology
Home Mechanics
Knitting
Leathercraft
Photography
Reading
Social Problems
Space Science
Typing
Vertebrate Anatomy, plus

some fifty other activities.

It can be seen from the above list that middle school teachers indeed must be talented and open to new ideas. This leads us to the last characteristic of the "new kind" of middle school teacher, one that is most important when we consider the diverse age group found in the middle school. That characteristic is flexibility.

4) If we look at the program and organization of the new middle school we can see the importance of the flexibility factor. The following schedule at the Desoto Middle School illustrates the flexibility found in the middle school:

Home Base	
Modules 1 - 7	Academic Block - 4 Teachers, 120 youngsters Language Arts, Science, Mathematics, Social Studies
Module 8	Lunch
Modules 9 - 10	Related Arts - Physical Education, Art, Home Economics, etc. (Academic Block Teachers Plan while youngsters in Related Arts)
Module 11	Cooking
Module 12	Electronics
Modules 13 - 14	Vertebrate Anatomy
Home Base	

In the above we see such innovations as an interdisciplinary team approach, flexible modular scheduling, block-time for an academic period where the size of the group and time segment changes from day to day depending on the needs of children, a school-within-a-school concept, nongradedness, team planning, and the wide-open afternoon modules featuring a large number of special interest activities.

The emphasis is on teaching the three R's, big ideas, broad principles and concepts in the disciplines, and most important for the age group, a real emphasis on personal development. Such schools as the Desoto and St. Cloud Schools (and hundreds more over the country that have adopted their model) stress physical involvement (children must be moving at the 10-14 age range) and social interaction. Much time is spent on the question every middle school youngster constantly poses, "Who am I?" The Affective and Psychomotor areas are not slighted in the new middle school.

In conclusion, a new kind of teacher is needed for the new middle school. We in teacher training at all levels (that includes colleges and school districts) must devote our energies in the years ahead to the task of identifying those persons who possess the characteristics mentioned above. If we do, we will do our part in humanizing the school for our youngsters in the seventies and make the middle school something special, something significant, something stimulating in American education.